

Claims:-

1. A method of harvesting an oil slick, which method includes:-

a) providing an oil slick harvesting vessel which has an endless belt conveyor for conveying spilled oil from one side of the vessel to the other and deployable hinged panels which extend along both ends and said other side of the vessel,

b) deploying the hinged panels so that they encompass an area on said other side of the vessel and within which the spilled oil can be collected, and

c) operating the endless belt conveyor to transfer the spilled oil into the encompassed area.

2. A method as claimed in Claim 1, in which the endless belt conveyor is so arranged that the end thereof at said one side of the vessel is at a lower level than the other end thereof so that, during operation of the endless belt conveyor, spilled oil contacted by the endless belt conveyor will be lifted and transferred into the encompassed area.

3. A method as claimed in Claim 1, in which pump means are provided for drawing water towards said endless belt conveyor and into the vessel from said one side thereof and discharging it downwardly from the vessel.

4. A method as claimed in Claim 3, in which the pump means and the endless conveyor are operated in such manner that the flow of water into or towards the vessel produces a flow of the spilled oil into contact with the endless belt conveyor for transfer thereof into the encompassed area.

5. An oil slick harvesting vessel which has an endless belt conveyor for conveying spilled oil from one side of the vessel to the other, and deployable hinged panels which extend along both ends and said other side of the vessel and which are deployable so that they encompass an area on said other side of the vessel and within which the spilled oil can be collected.

6. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 5, in which the hinged panels are provided with sealing means in the form of gaskets to stop any egress of oil from the encompassed or circumscribed area.

7. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 5, in which the hinged panels comprise two hinged panels at each end of the vessel, each of which has a length substantially equal to the width of the vessel.

8. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 7, in which the hinged panels also comprise three hinged panels at said other side of the vessel, each of which has a length substantially equal to the length of the vessel.

9. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 5, in which pump means are provided for drawing water towards and into the vessel from said one side thereof and discharging it downwardly from the vessel, the arrangement being such that, on operating the pump means and the endless conveyor, a flow of water is produced into the vessel so as to produce a flow of the spilled oil into contact with the endless belt conveyor for transfer thereof into the encompassed area.

10. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 9, in which the discharge outlets of the pump means are located below the vessel and are arranged for rotation to provide steerable thrust.

11. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 5, in which the endless belt conveyor includes a number of parallel flat belts which extend side by side within the vessel.

12. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 8, which has a length of the order of 10 metres and a width of the order of 5 metres, with two hingedly connected panels at each end of the vessel and pivotally connected to the ends of said other side of the vessel.

13. An oil slick harvesting vessel as claimed in Claim 12, in which the free ends of the hingedly connected panels at the ends of the vessel are pivotally connected to the three hingedly connected panels which each extend for substantially the length of the other

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side of the vessel, and in which the panels have a height (or depth) of the order of 9 metres with the arrangement such that the water line will be about 3 metres below the tops of the panels, giving a depth of about 6 metres below the water line.